

Infoletter

from the Desk of the Director General

Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture



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Institutional Affairs

▪ Director General of IICA reports to the OAS

Current global socioeconomic challenges, the achievements of technical cooperation delivered by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) in 2008 and the Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Rural Life in the Americas, to be held in Jamaica this year, were some of the topics that the Director General of the Institute, Chelston Brathwaite, aired for discussion at the meeting of the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States (OAS) on March 18 past. Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives commented favorably on the Institute's achievements summarized in the 2008 Annual Report. During his presentation, Brathwaite appealed to the countries to institute a new development model, one that makes agriculture and rural concerns a strategic priority. He also underscored the need to make food security one of the pivotal areas for priority attention in the Americas. "Our democracies", he said, "are not sustainable if citizens do not have access to food".

▪ New US Secretary of Agriculture meets with Director General

The new US Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, met with the Director General of the Institute, Chelston Brathwaite, with whom he discussed the challenges of food security. Both agreed that food security is a global concern and that institutions like IICA have a fundamental role to play, one that has repercussions for the living conditions of the population. In Vilsack's opinion, the challenges of climate change made the need to address the issue of food security more acute. At this first meeting with the US Secretary of Agriculture, Brathwaite insisted that the current rise in food prices was a problem that could be surmounted. Both felt that creative and innovative approaches were needed to enable farmers to continue working successfully in this production sector and appealed for additional investment in science, research and development.

▪ IICA defines actions in the area of food security

The Regional Directorates of IICA are involved in the preparation of projects and events intended to deal with the challenges and promote dialogue on food security in the Americas. Three strategic lines of action form the basis of the Institute's efforts to produce a favorable outcome through top-caliber technical cooperation: institutional innovation for food production and diversification through technological change; upgrading of capabilities of small- and medium-scale agricultural producers and family agriculture to bring them into markets; and analysis, monitoring and dissemination of policies and information on the state of and prospects for food security. The Regional Directorates have held three meetings with IICA Representatives in the countries and its specialists during this month of March. The first (virtual) was held for the Northern Region on March 4; the Central Region discussed actions to be monitored on March 5 and 6. And the Andean Region held a meeting in Colombia on March 10 and 11. Staff from the Southern Region met in Argentina on March 12 and 13 and, finally, another meeting for the Caribbean Region will be held in St. Kitts and Nevis on April 22 and 23. At the end of this new planning period, the Institute will announce actions to be carried out in conjunction with the countries.

▪ Jamaica will host the most important hemispheric meeting on agriculture and rural life

Jamaica's official information service announced that the Week of Agriculture and Rural Life of the Americas, the most important event for agriculture in the hemisphere, will be held in Jamaica in October this year. Delegations from 34 countries, headed by the Ministers of Agriculture, will attend two events during that week: the Fifth Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Rural Life in the context of the Summit of the Americas Process, and the Fifteenth Regular Meeting of the Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA). Both meetings will be held from October 25 through 31. The Ministerial Meeting is the most important hemispheric forum at which strategic priorities and actions for the sustainable development of agriculture and rural life in the hemisphere are decided by consensus. The IABA, however, is the highest governing body of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA). It meets every two years to adopt decisions on administrative matters, the budget and the priorities of technical cooperation delivered by the Institute. In Jamaica, the Board will elect a new Director General for the Institute and it is this person who will exercise leadership for four years, beginning in January of 2010. He or she will

replace Chelston W.D. Brathwaite, a national of Barbados, who has held this office since 2002 (he was re-elected for a second term in 2005). The discussions this year will center on the theme "Building Capacity for Enhancing Food Security and Rural Life in the Americas", of particular importance, given the sharp rise in food prices and the global economic crisis.

▪ **IICA and WFP will support poor farmers in Central America**

The World Food Program (WFP) and IICA signed an agreement on February 20 to provide support to rural communities in carrying out projects to face the problem of food insecurity and climate change. One of the joint areas is the project entitled "Purchases 4 Progress" which consists in using the purchasing power of the WFP to buy products from poor farmers and distributing those products among the beneficiaries of the WFP's humanitarian programs. The farmers will therefore receive assistance to increase income, consolidate access to markets and improve competitiveness. IICA will provide technical assistance to producers to improve the quality and quantity of their crops and modernize their institutional framework. For the two agencies, providing support to producers is of the essence if, indeed, an effort is to be made to fight hunger and poverty. The project will be carried out in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua over a three-year period, beginning in 2010. This agreement was signed in *Ciudad del Saber* (city of knowledge) by WFP's Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, Pedro Medrano, and IICA's Deputy Director General, Christopher Hansen.

Ministerial changes

Thomas Vilsack is the new Secretary of Agriculture of the United States; Mario Aldana assumed office as Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Food of Guatemala; and Hilson Baptiste is the newly appointed Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing and Environment of Antigua and Barbuda. In response to these appointments, the Director General sent them each a congratulatory note. Chelston Brathwaite also proposed IICA as a strategic partner in defining and carrying out technical cooperation agendas in accordance with the needs and policies of the countries. He further invited the new Secretary and the new Ministers to participate in the "Forum for Leaders in Agriculture", which was designed to discuss the challenges facing agriculture in the 21st century.

Regions and countries

▪ **At event organized by IICA IDB calls for strategy to achieve food security**

The Vice President of the Inter-American Development Bank, (IDB), Octavio Canuto, made an appeal to take advantage of the current situation of high food prices, contending that the opportunity existed to define and agree on a comprehensive and global strategy for food security. He said this at an activity organized by IICA on February 25 as part of the USDA's World Agricultural Forum at the Art Museum of the Americas at the OAS. During the first week of March, the Institute held a number of meetings with strategic partners, including the OAS, WFP and the International Food Information Council (IFIC).

Coming events

- **1 – 2 April 2009.** Meeting of the Special Advisory Commission on Management Issues (SACMI), IICA Headquarters, San Jose, Costa Rica.
- **14 - 16 July 2009.** XXIX Regular Meeting of the Executive Committee of IICA.
- **18 - 21 August 2009.** Representatives' Week 2009, IICA Headquarters, San Jose, Costa Rica.
- **25 - 30 October 2009.** Regular Meeting of the Inter-American Board of Agriculture and the Fifth Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Rural Life, Jamaica.

More information

- **Costa Rica hosts world meeting on Biosafety Capacity Building**

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